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Suburban American Punks and the Musical Rhetoric of *Green Day's* "Jesus of Suburbia"

Lisa M. Chuang & John P. Hart

This essay examines Green Day's "Jesus of Suburbia" as an artifact and reflection of suburban American punk culture. It looks at how music, lyrics, and the ethos of the performer interact to create a message that fostered identification between speaker and audience by using Sellnow and Sellnow's Langer-based illusion of life perspective. In this case it was found that music can be seen as an effective tool for expressing the suburban punk experience due to its ability to convey both linguistic and emotional content.

Keywords: Music; Punk; Rhetoric; Suburban

Punk has changed since the days of the *Sex Pistols*. With the band *Green Day*, punk became a commercial success, but what happened to punk in the process? *Green Day* has been dubbed by some as "innately suburban" (Loftus, 2004, ¶ 1), playing to an "audience of teens and tweens raised somewhere between the shopping mall and the strip mall" (Cortazar, 2004, ¶ 4). The band has been described as having "replaced punk's hardcore social rebellion with soft-core potty humor" (Ali, 2004, ¶ 1). This soft-core potty humor was evident in songs such as "Longview," which contained lyrics about spending the day watching TV and masturbating; "All By Myself," (Armstrong, 1994a) which joked about masturbating in someone else's room; and "King for a Day," which sang about dressing up in his mother's clothes, and included the lyrics "just wait 'til all the guys get a load of me" (Armstrong, 1997c, track 16) followed by circus-like music. However, in dismissing *Green Day's* songs as soft-core potty humor, the listener may miss a real message.

Even though the songs were seemingly simple, they conveyed the feelings of suburban punks who perceived their parents as hypocritical and thereby yearned for more meaning than their suburban lives appeared to provide. Though *Green Day's*

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newest politically charged album *American Idiot* came as a surprise to some, the band's previous work may have actually foreshadowed its latest album. With *Green Day*, soft-core potty humor became the social rebellion of punks tired of the boredom and apathy of the suburbs. Thus, the hardcore social rebellion of punks really never disappeared; it simply recreated itself with a disguise by which many were fooled.

After listening to *American Idiot*, it makes perfect sense for the California punks to adopt Freddie Mercury's rally call for their own cause; if ever there were a time for the suburbs of America to unite against ennui and apathy, it seems, that the time is now. (Banks, 2004, ¶ 1)

This essay examines *Green Day's* "Jesus of Suburbia" (Armstrong, 2004) as an artifact and reflection of suburban punk culture. It looks at how the music and lyrics of "Jesus of Suburbia" (Armstrong, 2004) work together with the ethos of the *Green Day* band to create a message that fosters common ground between speaker and audience, creating identification and persuasion by using Sellnow and Sellnow's (2001) illusion of life rhetorical perspective. Sellnow and Sellnow's (2001) illusion of life rhetorical perspective provides a framework for the analysis of the interdependent function of musical and lyrical elements that communicate messages of both content and emotion. The theory is rooted in the ideas of Susanne Langer (1953), who helped establish the theory of music as a nondiscursive symbol that could express the rhythms of life. The ideas of Gregg (1971), Gonzalez and Makay (1983), and Kenneth Burke (1969) help bring understanding to this study's nontraditional view of persuasion. As such, persuasion is seen as not just a method to bring others to action, but the ability to develop a consensus between speaker and audience in order to persuade one's self into identification with another. In that sense, persuasion through identification is persuading an individual or group simply into the creation or reaffirmation of themselves, or what Gregg (1971) described as maintaining or establishing one's self-hood. Thus, a message can be persuasive by means of identification, and the speaker's rhetorical power is his or her ability to find common ground with the audience.

The importance of this study is that music is a mode of communication that has affected individuals and societies, such as suburban punks, and its rhetorical implications should be studied. Furthermore, the music of suburban punks has been overlooked as nothing more than soft-core potty humor and thereby lacks examination.

Past studies gave much attention to bands of the 1970s and very early 1980s (e.g., Davies, 1996; Grossberg, 1986; Henry, 1989). Although they laid a foundation, these studies failed to acknowledge that a new culture of punk had emerged. *Green Day*, the popular punk band that began in 1990 in Berkeley, California, helped start the mid-1990s punk revival with its major label release of *Dookie* (D'Angelo, 2004). The *Green Day* band was chosen for this study due to its enormous influence on self-proclaimed punk followers, such as *New Found Glory*, *Something Corporate*, *Sum 41*, and *Yellow Card*, among others. Essentially, *Green Day* set the standard and became the archetype of the modern-day punk band.

"Jesus of Suburbia," (Armstrong, 2004) *Green Day's* 9-minute, five-movement song from their 2004 album *American Idiot*, was chosen for this study as it displays the different sides of *Green Day*, both lyrically and musically in one song, and was found to be the song that best represents the band. The length of the song not only afforded *Green Day* the opportunity to define itself better but also testified to *Green Day's* attempt to make their song noncommercial, as 9-minute songs generally do not receive radio airtime. "Jesus of Suburbia" is an example of an authentic, modern-day punk song not held back by the conventions of punk itself.

The Context of Punks and Suburban America

Boredom of middle-class life and ideals, self-marginalization, rebellion against order, search for authenticity, and anticorporate attitudes appeared as prominent themes in studies conducted on punk (e.g., Clark, 2003; Davies, 1996; Grossberg, 1986; Henry, 1989; Middleton, 2002). Similar themes, such as a need for meaning rather than affluence, struggle against conformity and hypocrisy, and isolation, were found in the literature focused on suburban youth (e.g., Baumgartner, 1988; Gaines, 1994; Luthar & Becker, 2002; Wooden, 1995). Punk ideals appeared as the opposite of American suburban ideals of conformity, success based on affluence, and assimilation. Hence, the implications of suburban life appeared to provide a stage upon which punk rock thrives. As many suburban youth turned to "releases" such as alcohol (Luthar & Becker) or mischievous crimes (Gaines), others turned to subcultures such as punk in order to "[resist] boredom by dissenting with purpose" (Gaines, p. 53). Accordingly, punk is an alternative form of release for many suburban American teens.

Music as Rhetoric Research

In considering the analysis of music, some studies argued that rhetorical power is found only when considering both musical score and lyrics (e.g., Gonzalez & Makay, 1983; Hart, 1998; Irvine & Kirkpatrick, 1972; Langer, 1953, 1957; LeCoat, 1976; Sellnow, 1996, 1999; Sellnow & Sellnow, 2001). Whereas, additional studies chose to look at music apart from the lyrics (e.g., Burns, 2003; Leblanc, 1979; Matula, 2000; Sellnow & Sellnow, 1993, 1996; Stuessy, 1990), while others looked at lyrics apart from the music (e.g., Chaffee, 1985; Frith, 1988; Hirsch, 1971; Rice, 1980). This study, based on the abovementioned studies, operates under the theoretical framework that musical form has the ability to influence the rhetorical message of the lyrics (the discursive message), and both musical score and lyrics should be analyzed.

Susanne Langer (1953, 1957) is the backbone of this study's method. Langer (1953, 1957) argued that music helps one come to know through an aesthetic symbol system that is nondiscursive, and thereby music is a significant form that can express a virtual experience that language is unfit to express. Music creates the illusion of "virtual time," which expresses emotions through rhythm. Since rhythm is the relation between tensions—and not just equal divisions of time such as meter—musical

elements such as chord progressions, resolutions of dissonances, or the direction of melodic passages can create rhythm (Langer, 1953, 1957). Lyrical content conveys “virtual experience,” which discursively expresses the artist’s experience (Langer, 1953, 1957). Even though Langer argued for the ways in which music functions as an aesthetic symbol and an expression of feelings, she did not account for the rhetorical function of music. This study uses Sellnow and Sellnow’s (2001) illusion of life rhetorical perspective, which extends Langer’s theory of aesthetic symbolism by providing an avenue for music to be rhetorically analyzed.

Models for Interpreting Music as Rhetoric

Langer was the first modern philosopher to grapple successfully with the issue of the aesthetic symbolism of music. Her ideas were used by important rhetorical studies, such as Irvine and Kirkpatrick (1972) who referenced Langer in their concept of “experiential capacity” (p. 279); that is, the idea that personal experiences provide meaning to musical variables. Langer (1953) stated, “All artistic forms are conceived and presented. Since their substance is illusion . . . they are, from the standpoint of practical reality, mere forms; they exist only for the sense of imagination that perceives them” (p. 50). This idea also was seen in Gonzalez and Makay’s (1983) concept of ascription; that is, the idea that “communicators impute meanings to things and experiences and then express the meanings through symbolic processes” (p. 4).

Irvine and Kirkpatrick (1972), Gonzalez and Makay (1983), Sellnow (1999), and Sellnow and Sellnow (2001) argued that music’s rhetorical power is found when considering both musical score and lyrics and provided actual models for analyzing music as rhetoric. All models included instrumentation, melody, harmony/chording, rding, rhythm, and lyrics (if available) as variables for analyzing music as rhetoric.

Both Gonzalez and Makay (1983) and Irvine and Kirkpatrick (1972) built their models on familiar and unfamiliar variables that stemmed from the character of the artist or the musical structure. However, their models did not account for the relationship between music and its rhetorical impact, as they relied heavily upon elements of familiarity, and not the message the music imparts based upon the relationship between the music and the lyrics.

Justification of Method

Langer (1953) is credited for many of the studies presented as models for consideration in this study; additionally, this study found it appropriate to seriously consider Sellnow and Sellnow’s (2001) illusion of life rhetorical perspective. This method not only allows for discussion of the whole artifact, by examining the relationship between music and lyrics and the message they imparted, it also clearly lays out a model for analyzing music as rhetoric that closely follows the concepts of Langer, while extending her ideas by turning them into a methodology.

Inclusion of Ethos

This study specifically addresses the element of ethos, which was inferred to by other authors (e.g., Gonzalez & Makay, 1983; Gregg, 1971; Irvine & Kirkpatrick, 1972; LeCoat, 1976; Sellnow, 1996; Sellnow & Sellnow, 1993), but not addressed by Langer. The inclusion of ethos adds to the understanding of music as rhetoric in the punk genre by examining the lyrical, musical, and ideological reputation of *Green Day's* "Jesus of Suburbia." Musical and lyrical reputation is included in the ethos analysis, as the lyrics and music an artist produces help determine their character and reputation. Therefore, since music and lyrics are associated with a specific artist, analyzing whether certain musical or lyrical elements maintain consistency with their past work, or deviate from them, plays a role in determining whether the artist maintains his/her in-group, gains an out-group, or does both. Irvine and Kirkpatrick's (1972) models analyzed music based on such elements as the audience's familiarity with certain musical structures. Gonzalez and Makay (1983) examined the audience's acceptance of Dylan's gospel songs based on the audience's ability to associate the lyrics and music to Dylan's pregospel songs. The concept of in-groups and out-groups also was found in such studies as Carter (1980), Denisoff and Levine (1971), and Gregg (1971).

Ideological reputation plays a role in determining the character of an artist. Wherefore, discovering whether the values espoused in an artist's work maintains consistency with the actual lives they lead plays a role in determining whether the artist maintains a certain audience. Ideological reputation was found in such studies as Irvine and Kirkpatrick (1972), who referred to it as "ethical reputation of the source" (p. 274); Gregg (1971), who referred to it as "the ego-function" (p. 71); and LeCoat (1976), who described it as a reflection of a composer's morals during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. Using the illusion of life rhetorical perspective, and specifically addressing the factor of ethos, this study is able to make a more complete analysis of "Jesus of Suburbia"—as an artifact and a reflection of suburban punk culture—by analyzing how the music, lyrics, and ethos work together to persuade through identification, creating a common ground between the speaker (*Green Day*) and the audience.

The Method: Illusion of Life Rhetorical Perspective

Sellnow and Sellnow (2001) argued that "didactic music communicates as an aesthetic symbol by creating an illusion of life for listeners through the dynamic interaction between virtual experience (lyrics) and virtual time (music)" (p. 399). The critic has three goals: (a) discover the conceptual messages communicated in the lyrics, (b) determine the intensity and release patterns present in the musical form and determine what emotions they convey, and (c) discover the relationship between the lyrics and the music (Sellnow & Sellnow, 2001).

The following sections describe in further detail how the illusion of virtual time (music), virtual experience (lyrics), and ethos are analyzed within the method.

Virtual Experience (Lyrics)

Virtual experience is either a poetic or dramatic illusion, and within each illusion, a comic or tragic rhythm is stressed.

Poetic illusions look back into the virtual past and lack suspense because the events already have occurred. Poetic illusions represent a release pattern in human feeling.

Dramatic illusions look forward into the virtual future and contain suspense because the future is unknown. Dramatic illusions represent intensity patterns.

Comic rhythm is characterized by self-preservation and optimism. "Comic rhythm is a positive outlook, a determined process" (Sellnow & Sellnow, 2001, p. 401). Comic rhythm represents an intensity pattern in human feeling.

Tragic rhythm is characterized by self-consummation, pessimism, moral conflict, and sacrifice. "Tragic rhythm . . . is a fulfillment, and its form is often closed and final. The protagonist is aware of his or her fate and must discover a way to deal with it" (Sellnow & Sellnow, 2001, p. 401). Tragic rhythm represents a release pattern in human feeling.

Virtual Time (Music)

The musical score was examined for patterns of intensity and release within the rhythmic, harmonic, melodic, phrasing, and instrumental structures. Intensities symbolize instability, and releases symbolize resolution. The examination was used to determine the emotional meaning present in the musical form. The goal of the critic was to determine the predominant elements when hearing the piece holistically. Table 1 describes the musical elements that create intensity or release patterns within each structure of analysis.

Congruity and Incongruity

"Music's rhetorical significance lies in the degree of congruity or incongruity that exists between virtual experience (lyrics) and virtual time (music)" (Sellnow & Sellnow, 2001, p. 395). After examining the lyrical and musical elements and their rhetorical implications separately, the two variables were examined together. Congruity and incongruity were determined by combining the patterns found within the musical and lyrical analysis.

Congruent messages

Both lyrics and music contain release patterns, or both lyrics and music contain intensity patterns. Although the overall message in congruent messages may be more poignant, it sacrifices listener appeal and may create an in-group message, losing a wider or new audience (out-group).

Table 1 Musical Analysis

| Musical variable | Intensity | Release |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Rhythmic Structure | | |
| Tempo | Fast/driving | Slow |
| Meter | Changing | Consistent |
| Beat | Syncopated | Duple/triple |
| Harmonic Structure | | |
| Tonic relationship | Avoids frequent returns to tonic | Frequently returns to tonic |
| Dissonance/consonance relationship | Dissonance | Consonance |
| Melodic Structure | | |
| Intervals | Disjunct melody lines | Conjunct melody lines |
| Duration | Short-held notes | Long-held notes |
| Phrasing | | |
| Articulation | Staccato | Legato |
| Dynamics | Crescendo, loud | Decreascendo, soft |
| Rate | Accelerando | Ritardando |
| Instrumentation | | |
| Instrument ^a | Bass, percussion, electric guitar | Strings, acoustic guitar |

Sellnow & Sellnow (2001).

^aInstruments in the instrumentation section are provided only as examples of instruments played in a stereotypical manner. The intensity and release patterns of instrumentation are dependent upon how the instrument is played within a specific piece of music.

Incongruent messages

The lyrics and music simultaneously contain different patterns of intensity or release. Incongruent messages may yield the following results, according to Sellnow (1999):

- a) listener misinterpretation of the intended message, b) usurp of the lyrical message altogether, resulting in an emotional message devoid of linguistic meaning, or c) "couch" the potentially defense arousing discursive message [i.e., controversial message] in ambiguity, allowing the rhetor to persuade the listener gradually and systematically toward accepting the ultimate conclusion. (p. 70)

Ethos

The analysis of ethos examined the musical, lyrical, and ideological reputation of *Green Day*. Musical and lyrical reputation examined whether or not *Green Day* used musical and lyrical elements similar to its past work. Ideological reputation examined the congruity between the values espoused in "Jesus of Suburbia" (Armstrong, 2004) and the lives led by *Green Day*. Congruity between the lyrical and musical elements of *Green Day*'s past and present work ("Jesus of Suburbia") signified its ability to

maintain its previous suburban punk audience (in-group). Incongruities of musical and lyrical elements signified *Green Day's* attempt to establish a wider or new audience (out-group). An incongruity between what *Green Day* said and what it did disestablished its authenticity, leading to an inability to maintain its suburban punk audience. On the other hand, congruity between the values espoused in "Jesus of Suburbia" (Armstrong, 2004) and the lives led by *Green Day* established *Green Day's* authenticity, leading to maintenance of their suburban punk audience.

Lyrical Analysis

Movement I

In verse 1 of Movement I, Jesus of Suburbia introduces himself with the following lyrics:

I'm the son of rage and love,
The Jesus of suburbia,
From the bible of "none of the above,"
On a steady diet of,
Soda pop and Ritalin,
No one ever died for my,
Sins in hell,
As far as I can tell,
At least the ones I got away with. (Armstrong, 2004, *American idiot*, track 2)

The verse contains the backwards-looking characteristic of poetic illusion—as Jesus looks back on himself in order to introduce himself as the son of rage and love—and the awareness of one's fate characteristic of tragic rhythm—as Jesus reflects on who he is and where he is from ("From the bible none of the above") with a sense of tragic predetermined fate.

The chorus of the first movement then continues to show Jesus' position as the protagonist who is coping with a fate he cannot change.

But there's nothing wrong with me,
In a land of make believe,
That don't believe in me. (Armstrong, 2004, *American idiot*, track 2)

Verse 3 follows:

Get my television fix,
Sitting on my crucifix,
The living room in my private womb,
While the moms and Brads are away,
To fall in love and fall in debt,
To alcohol and cigarettes,
And Mary Jane,
To keep me insane,
And doing someone else's cocaine. (Armstrong, 2004, *American idiot*, track 2)

The third verse depicts Jesus' use of love, money, the TV, alcohol, cigarettes, marijuana, and cocaine to cope, which illustrates his dissatisfaction and his attempt to assuage his existence. It also demonstrates Jesus of Suburbia's lack of real relationships, as he shares in a community of substances. Movement I primarily sets the scene for Jesus of Suburbia's existence.

Movement II

In Movement II, Jesus looks back (poetic illusion), further examines the details of his world with a sense of tragic fate (tragic rhythm) and begins to think about the meaning of things seen in his daily life, such as the parking lot of the 7-11 and the graffiti on bathroom stalls.

At the center of the earth
In the parking lot,
Of the 7-11 where I was taught,
The motto was just a lie
It says: home is where your heart is,
But what a shame,
Cause' everyone's heart,
Doesn't beat the same,
We're beating out of time. (Armstrong, 2004, *American idiot*, track 2)

Hence, Jesus begins to question the meaning of "home" and starts to unpack the meaning of his 7-11 upbringing.

Verse 3 of Movement II follows:

I read the graffiti,
In the bathroom stall,
Like the holy scriptures in the shopping mall,
And so it seemed to confess,
It didn't say much,
But it only confirmed that,
The center of the earth,
Is the end of the world,
And I could really care less. (Armstrong, 2004, *American idiot*, track 2)

The graffiti on the bathroom stall is where Jesus of Suburbia begins to discover truth. As Jesus unpacks the relics of his existence, his apathy and resolve turn into rage as the song moves into Movement III.

Movement III

The third movement begins with the verse:

I don't care if you don't
I don't care if you don't,
I don't care if you don't care. (Armstrong, 2004, *American idiot*, track 2)

This verse is repeated four times.

The opening verse moves straight into the lyrics of verse 2.

Everyone's so full of shit!
Born and raised by hypocrites,
Hearts recycled but never saved,
From the cradle to the grave,
We are the kids of war and peace,
From Anaheim to the Middle East,
We are the stories and disciples of,
The Jesus of Suburbia. (Armstrong, 2004, *American idiot*, track 2)

Jesus of Suburbia's shift into rage, rather than a reflective resolve, illustrates the movement's shift from poetic to dramatic illusion. Jesus' pessimism illustrates a tragic rhythm, as he discovers that he has been "born and raised by hypocrites," and his existence is a lie.

Movement III ends with the lyrics:

Land of make believe,
And it don't believe in me,
And I don't believe,
And I don't care! (Armstrong, 2004, *American idiot*, track 2)

Jesus of Suburbia's constant exclamation of "I don't care" demonstrates an active apathy. In other words, it illustrates protesting against suburban life by actively showing the boredom of it.

Movement IV

Movement IV consists of only two verses with no chorus. It begins with Jesus calming down from his rage and becoming reflective.

Dearly beloved, are you listening?
I can't remember a word that you were saying,
Are we demented? Or am I disturbed?
The space that's in between insane and insecure. (Armstrong, 2004, *American idiot*, track 2)

This first verse demonstrates the looking-back-into-the-past characteristic of poetic illusion with Jesus of Suburbia reflecting, "Are we demented? Or am I disturbed?" Jesus' continued coping with fate, and dealings with a moral conflict, demonstrates a tragic rhythm.

Verse 2 follows:

Oh therapy can you please fill the void?
Am I retarded or am I just overjoyed?
Nobody's perfect and I stand accused,
For lack of a better word, and that's my best excuse. (Armstrong, 2004, *American idiot*, track 2)

Jesus of Suburbia looks forward into the future and asks therapy to "please fill the void;" therefore, verse 2 depicts the self-preservation of comic rhythm and the search-for-resolution of dramatic illusion.

Movement IV illustrates Jesus' conversation with a God he has trouble hearing. It is the first time in the song where Jesus of Suburbia admits that he is not perfect and wonders if his situation is his fault.

Movement V

After having a more quiet moment of contemplation in Movement IV, Jesus of Suburbia takes action in Movement V.

Verse 1

To live and not to breathe,
Is to die in tragedy,
To run, to run away,
To find what you believe,

Chorus

And I leave behind,
This hurricane of fucking lies. (Armstrong, 2004, *American idiot*, track 2)

Having hinged on both dramatic and poetic illusions in Movement IV, Jesus is finally able to put his past behind him and tries to start a new life, depicting the self-preservation of comic rhythm and the "forward looking into the virtual future" (Sellnow & Sellnow, 2001, p. 400) of dramatic illusion.

In verse 2 of Movement V, Jesus takes action.

I lost my faith to this,
This town that don't exist,
So I run, I run away,
To the light of masochists. (Armstrong, 2004, *American idiot*, track 2)

A bridge leads into the musical ending of the song and plays as if Jesus of Suburbia is just about to leave the suburbs, while looking back one last time.

I don't feel any shame,
I won't apologize,
When there ain't nowhere you can go,
Running away from pain,
When you've been victimized,
Tales from another broken home. (Armstrong, 2004, *American idiot*, track 2)

The lyrics show the range of emotions that accompany the coming-of-age of Jesus of Suburbia, a suburban teenager raised by the 7-11 and his television. The antagonists in the story are represented by anything that is make-believe, including religion, suburbia, and ironically Jesus himself: For if everything Jesus knows is make-believe, then he himself is make-believe. Thus, Jesus is both the protagonist and the antagonist. The title, "Jesus of Suburbia," can be interpreted as the idea that suburbia is the land of make-believe; that is, everything created by the suburbs, including Jesus, is a lie, and truth exists somewhere beyond the confines of the living room and the 7-11.

Musical Analysis

The many changes in rhythm, harmonic structure, phrasing, instrumentation, and melody enable the listener to go on a journey of Jesus of Suburbia's emotions; it also keeps the 9-minute piece from becoming stale. Overall, the main patterns of intensity and release that came out of the musical elements are Movement I, intensity; Movement II, release; Movement III, intensity; Movement IV, release; and Movement V, intensity on the verses and release on the bridge. As stated earlier in this essay, intensity symbolizes tension or instability, and release symbolizes resolution. Through the intensity and release patterns, emotion is articulated (Langer, 1953). The musical analysis is depicted in Tables 2 through 6. The main pattern of intensity and/or release was determined by which variables outweighed the other. In instances where the variables were even, the main pattern was determined as intensity and release.

Congruities and Incongruities: Analyzing the Music with the Lyrics

In Movement I, the song began with intensity patterns in the music and release patterns in the lyrics, creating an incongruity. This incongruity helped to take away attention from the controversial messages in the lyrics—Jesus doing marijuana and cocaine and watching television on his crucifix. The incongruent message in Movement I worked as a hook to draw listeners in, rather than deterring them by using a congruent message. The incongruity also worked to attract listeners who were drawn in by the musical style or by the discursive message, consequently attracting a wider audience. As the song progressed to Movement II, the incongruent message became congruent. Once *Green Day* had the listener hooked by the first movement, it was able to create a more poignant message in Movement II.

Movement III incorporated an incongruent message in the first verse, an intense congruent and poignant message in the second verse, followed by an incongruent

Table 2 Rhythmic Structure

| Movement | Tempo | Meter | Beat | Main pattern |
|----------|--------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| I | Fast | Consistent | Syncopated & duple | Intensity & release |
| II | Slow | Consistent | Duple | Release |
| III | | | | |
| Verse 1 | Fast | 3/4, changes in syncopated verse 2 | | Intensity |
| Verse 2 | Fast/driving | 4/4, changed from verse 1 | Duple, one line syncopated | Intensity |
| IV | Slow | Consistent | Duple | Release |
| V | | | | |
| Verses | Fast | Consistent | Syncopated | Intensity |
| Bridge | Slow | Consistent | Duple | Release |

Table 3 Harmonic Structure

| Movement | Tonic relationship | Dissonant/Consonant | Main pattern |
|----------|------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| I | Frequently returned to tonic | Dissonant | Intensity & release |
| II | Frequently returned to tonic | Dissonant & consonant | Release |
| III | Frequently returned to tonic | Dissonant | Intensity & release |
| IV | Frequently returned to tonic | Consonant | Release |
| V | Frequently returned to tonic | Dissonant | Intensity & release |

Table 4 Melodic Structure

| Movement | Interval | Duration | Main pattern |
|----------|---|------------------|---------------------|
| I | Conjunct, descending | Short-held notes | Release |
| II | Conjunct, descending & ascending | Short-held notes | Intensity & release |
| III | | | |
| Verse 1 | Conjunct & disjunct, descending & ascending | Long-held notes | Release |
| Verse 2 | Neither, neither | Short-held notes | Intensity |
| Verse 3 | Conjunct, descending & ascending | Long-held notes | Release |
| IV | Conjunct, descending & ascending | Short-held notes | Intensity & release |
| V | | | |
| Verses | Conjunct, descending & ascending | Short-held notes | Intensity & release |
| Motif 2 | Conjunct, descending | Short-held notes | Release |

message in the third verse. Since the intense congruent message was sandwiched between two incongruent messages, *Green Day* was able to maintain listener appeal and to still get its message across.

Movement IV used a congruent message of release patterns in the first verse and an incongruent message in the second verse. The self-preservation and seeking of

Table 5 Phrasing

| Movement | Articulation | Dynamics | Rate | Main pattern |
|----------|--------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| I | Accented | Loud | Accelerando | Intensity |
| II | Legato | Decrescendo | Ritardando | Release |
| III | Accented | Loud | Accelerando | Intensity |
| IV | Legato | Soft | Ritardando | Release |
| V | | | | |
| Verses | Accented | Loud | Accelerando | Intensity |
| Bridge | Legato | Soft | Ritardando | Release |

Table 6 Instrumentation

| Movement | Instruments | Main pattern |
|----------|--|--------------|
| I | Distorted electric guitar, electric bass, drums | Intensity |
| II | | |
| Verses | Piano, drums, distorted electric guitar, electric bass | Release |
| Chorus | Distorted electric guitar, electric bass, drums | Intensity |
| III | Distorted electric guitar, electric bass, drums | Intensity |
| IV | Glockenspiel, clean/muted guitar, electric bass, drums | Release |
| V | | |
| Verses | Distorted electric guitar, electric bass, drums | Intensity |
| Bridge | Piano | Release |

resolution in verse 2 created an intensity pattern (dramatic and comic); whereas, the music that started Movement IV remained the same, creating an incongruity that set up the running away of Jesus of Suburbia in the next movement. Movement V used an intense congruent message in the verses and an incongruent message in the bridge (which contained intense lyrics coupled with subdued music). By incorporating five short movements, and congruent messages sandwiched between incongruent messages, *Green Day* made its controversial message into digestible pieces for a wider listener appeal. Table 7 provides a succinct account of the congruity and incongruity between the lyrics and the music.

Ethos Analysis

Lyrical Reputation

Lyrically, *Green Day* is finally saying what its members have always meant. While songs such as “Christie Road” (Armstrong, 1991b) and “Android” (Armstrong, 1991a)

Table 7 Congruent and Incongruent

| Movement | Lyrical pattern | Musical pattern | Congruent/Incongruent |
|----------|---------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| I | Poetic & tragic-release | Intensity | Incongruent |
| II | Poetic & tragic-release | Release | Congruent |
| III | Dramatic & tragic-intensity & release | Intensity | Congruent & incongruent |
| IV | | | |
| Verses 1 | Poetic & tragic-release | Release | Congruent |
| Verses 2 | Dramatic & comic-intensity | Release | Incongruent |
| V | | | |
| Verses | Dramatic & comic-intensity | Intensity | Congruent |
| Bridge | Dramatic & comic-intensity | Release | Incongruent |

from *Kerplunk* "Burnout," (Armstrong, 1994c) "Longview," (Armstrong, 1994d) and "Sassafras Roots" from *Dookie* (Armstrong, 1994e); "Brat" (Armstrong, 1994b) and "Walking Contradiction" (Armstrong, 1994f) from *Insomniac*; and "The Grouch" and "Redundant" from *Nimrod* (Armstrong, 1997a,b) all contained themes of suburban apathy, frustration, and boredom, they did so with a "wacky irony" (Ali, 2004, ¶ 3) that mainly insiders understood and others dismissed as "potty humor" (Ali, ¶ 1). This type of wacky irony was best described by Grossberg (1986) as the punk attitude where "everything is taken both too seriously and at the same time as a joke with a certain irony" (p. 65). *Green Day* stopped hiding behind its wacky irony with "Jesus of Suburbia," (Armstrong, 2004) and, therefore, long-time suburban fans of *Green Day* still resonated with the themes, and newcomers were able to better grasp the ideas.

Musical Reputation

Musically, *Green Day* drew from many sources, old and new. *Green Day* borrowed from itself, yet found inspiration in the music of artists like Bob Dylan, *The Who*, and soundtracks like *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, *West Side Story*, and *Grease* (Moss, 2004).

The hard-driving punk sound presented in Movement III is found in the earlier works of *Green Day*, such as *1,039 Smoothed out Sloppy Hours* (Armstrong, 1990) and *Kerplunk* (Armstrong, 1991). *Green Day*'s experimental side of using nontraditional punk instruments is also found in previous albums such as *Nimrod* (Armstrong, 1997a, b), where the band used brass horns, and *Warning* (2000), which prominently displayed an organ on one of its tracks. As such, old fans were not thrown off guard with *Green Day*'s use of a piano and Glockenspiel in "Jesus of Suburbia," and new fans may have found this departure from traditional punk instruments attractive. "Perhaps listeners are more likely to accept change in a performer's lyrical story and musical style when that shift occurs incrementally within one dimension only, the other dimension remaining constant and predictable" (Sellnow, 1996, p. 59). *Green Day*'s combination of lyrical and musical elements, consistent with their previous work but displayed in a new way, helped the band gain a larger audience while maintaining their previous audience.

Ideological Reputation

Musically, *Green Day* may have brought a different sound to the punk world, but its lifestyle always has been punk. Billie Joe Armstrong, guitar player and lead singer of *Green Day* said, "I can never drop the [punk] lifestyle—it's me. It embodies me," (Armstrong quoted in, Arnold, 2000, ¶ 13). Despite its success, *Green Day* has always tried to maintain its "small is beautiful ethos" (Arnold, ¶ 14). The band rehearses in a forgotten part of Oakland, plays affordable shows (Knopper, 2005), started a private record label to record their friends' projects and has been described as "a great role model for how to survive stardom with your dignity intact" (Arnold, ¶ 15). This

dignity helped *Green Day* maintain an authenticity that allowed it to release an album like *American Idiot* without too much criticism.

Conclusions and Implications

Three general implications are drawn from the analysis. First, by specifically addressing the element of ethos, the critic was not only able to identify how the music and lyrics worked together to create meaning and persuade but also was able to determine if the ethos of the rhetor increased or decreased identification and persuasion. *Green Day* was able to use lyrical and musical themes consistent with previous works and to display them in a new way in order to gain a larger audience. For example, *Green Day* took themes of suburban boredom and lyrically presented them, without disguise, so a larger audience would understand and, at the same time, was able to retain its old audience. The band also took musical elements used in their previous works and presented them within a five-movement song that attracted the attention of a larger audience and maintained the old audience.

The success of *Green Day*'s congruent lyrical and musical reputation, however, rested in its ability to maintain an authentic identity and to keep ideologies congruent. Although *Green Day* may have lost its Gilman Street audience by signing with a major label in 1994, it has since taken measures to ensure its songs remain believable to its suburban punk audience by the lives the band leads. By examining *Green Day*'s ethos, the critic was able to see how *Green Day* maintained its suburban punk audience while gaining a new audience.

Second, music is an effective tool for expressing the suburban punk experience. Because music communicates using a system of both discursive and nondiscursive symbols, it is able to free itself from the rules of the conventional language system—created by the very conventions punk tried to free itself from. It was, therefore, able to give voice to a group that might not otherwise be heard. According to Langer (1953), “Music. . . can express the forms of vital experience which language is peculiarly unfit to convey” (p. 32). With “Jesus of Suburbia,” (Armstrong, 2004) *Green Day* was able to express the vital experience of suburban punks found in suburban and punk studies (e.g., Clark, 2003; Gaines, 1994; Grossberg, 1986; Henry, 1989; Luthar & Becker, 2002; Middleton, 2002) “which language is particularly unfit to convey” (Langer, 1953, p. 32). By sandwiching congruent, more poignant, or controversial messages between incongruent, less poignant messages, the rhetor was able to persuade the general public to hear the message, and, at the same time, create an in-group message to help establish identification. With this analysis came a lens for looking at the music of suburban punk youth. The “Jesus of Suburbia” (Armstrong, 2004) theme of rejecting the hypocrisy of the suburbs, finding truth, effectively utilized music, its rhetorical implications to help outsiders see, and insiders establish self-hood, can be seen as an effective tool for expressing the suburban punk experience.

Third, the analysis furthered the understanding of rhetorical strategies that can be used to simultaneously reaffirm insiders and to persuade outsiders. *Green Day* used

incongruent messages to its advantage. According to *Green Day* bass player Mike Dirnt, "The irony within the song [Jesus of Suburbia] is it carries the energy that we tap into sometimes, which is having an absolutely great time with a miserable message" (Moss, 2004). *Green Day* was able to gain an audience by using music that sounded like it was having a great time and was able to maintain its previous audience who understood both the music and the message.

Green Day also reaffirmed insiders and persuaded outsiders by using a method similar to hiding medicine in the dessert. *Green Day* created the illusion of having a "great time with a miserable message" (Dirnt quoted in Moss, 2004, ¶ 21) by sandwiching congruent, more poignant, or controversial messages between incongruent, (and therefore) less poignant messages, thereby slowly persuading outsiders by giving them messages that were easier to digest. Insiders, on the other hand, were able to see through the dessert disguise to the message. "The incremental development of a persuasive message in music is unique because rhetors can employ both discursive and non-discursive formations to move listeners gradually to accept the ultimate argument" (Sellnow, 1999, p. 9). The use of a narrative also may have helped listeners slowly accept the ultimate message of rejecting the hypocrisy of the suburbs and finding truth.

Music is a form of communication that pervades individuals and societies. Thenceforth, understanding the rhetorical strategies employed in music may help bring about a better understanding of different cultures through their music. Ultimately, *Green Day* used rhetorical strategies that worked in finding a common ground, or identification, between suburban punks and *Green Day*, thereby fostering self-persuasion among suburban punks. Through incongruity, *Green Day* established enough common ground between its outside audience to persuade them into listening, and perhaps understanding, by alternating incongruent and congruent messages.

This study contributes to the field of rhetoric by adding a different perspective on music as communication regarding a specific culture, and by contributing rhetorical strategies that can be used to slowly persuade outsiders to listen to an inside or controversial message. It also presents a need for the continual study of music as communication. Future studies should first examine other *Green Day* songs in order to determine if the rhetorical strategies used in "Jesus of Suburbia" (Armstrong, 2004) are consistent with other *Green Day* songs. Second, rhetorical consistency should be examined among similar bands in the punk genre.

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